



## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: Ajmal's Success Story

The United States mission in Afghanistan was one of peril and danger, but that did not stop one family from helping American troops. Ajmal and his wife, and their five children, emigrated to the United States in February of 2020, just prior to the complete withdrawal of the United States military from Afghanistan. Prior to emigrating, Ajmal worked with Mercy Corps, and their partnership with the U.S. military to bring humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan. Ajmal said escaping the sectarian violence of Afghanistan was hard, because he was dedicated to his helping people through his work, but it became necessary to leave.

“When news of COVID spreading in the United States reached us, my wife forced me to apply to emigrate,” Ajmal said. “We have been amazingly lucky. We still have family in Afghanistan trying to leave, like my parents. They receive threats every day from the Taliban as retribution for working with the U.S. military.”

Ajmal, his wife, and their 5 children moved to the United States and lived temporarily with Ajmal's uncle in Bay Point. Ajmal said the Bay Area has a very large and growing Afghan-refugee population, which helped him initially adjust to life in the United States. Ajmal began working via Uber and Doordash delivering meals, and as a taxi driver.

“Everything here is just so expensive, my family quickly found us in financial trouble. We thought we were going to be evicted,” Ajmal said. “We called Catholic Charities, and they told us about St. Vincent de Paul and how they offer rental assistance to people in need. We applied for help, and I met two volunteers, Ron and Shawna, and introduced them to my family. It was a true blessing meeting them.”

Ron and Shawna, two volunteer Vincentians at SVdP's St. Bonaventure Branch in Concord, helped Ajmal and his family deal with their rental crisis, and tried their best to help them adjust to life in America and truly get themselves started in their new lives. Ron and Shawna told Ajmal about the Workforce Development Program at St. Vincent de Paul, a paid part-time training and job-experience program. Ajmal said he was working himself to exhaustion driving for Uber and Doordash, and he thought the Workforce Development Program would be a huge help to him.

“The workforce program at St. Vincent de Paul was a huge help for me,” Ajmal said. “I have a degree, and am trained in a lot of ways, but what I lacked was the time to adjust or the opportunity to seek jobs where I used my degree because I had to provide for my family. St. Vincent de Paul helped me have the time and peace of mind to find a great job where I am helping people every day.”

Ajmal graduated from the Workforce Development Program and found a job as director of operations for a nonprofit in Sacramento. Ajmal said his work helps him feel like he is paying back the kindness people have shown his family since they came to the United States.

“It feels great to be helping people,” Ajmal said. “This is what I did when my family were in Afghanistan, and I am happy that I get to continue that work. I am so thankful for all the kindness St. Vincent de Paul and other organizations have shown my family, it really is a blessing.”

Ajmal also volunteers his time to occasionally address new classes of the Workforce Development Program at St. Vincent de Paul. Ajmal has been able to offer advice and guidance to participants, because he knows exactly what they are going through having gone through the program himself.